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# THE ATONEMENT

BY REV. JAMES STALKER, D.D.

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# THE ATONEMENT

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BY THE REV.

JAMES STALKER, D.D.,

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UNITED FREE CHURCH COLLEGE, ABERDEEN

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TO  
THE TRUSTEES  
OF  
THE McDONALD OF FERINTOSH TRUST,  
AT WHOSE REQUEST AND  
UNDER WHOSE AUSPICES THESE LECTURES  
WERE DELIVERED  
AT INVERNESS, OCTOBER 6TH,  
7TH, AND 8TH, 1908.



## PREFACE

**I**T is with extreme diffidence that I venture to appear in print as a writer on this subject. Indeed, had not an external call come, I do not think I should have broken silence. But, when thus called, I could not decline to do what in me lay to add volume to the current which is flowing so strongly in the direction of a revived interest in this doctrine.

I have to confess that I have myself been slow to learn at this point, the earlier phases of Christ's life absorbing my attention. Yet I have been always con-

scious of the proximity of facts and truths in this direction, still to be appreciated, which an access of new experience might at any moment invest with commanding interest. This is exactly the state of mind of many in our generation; and to these it will be no drawback that I have felt keenly, and still feel, the difficulties inherent in the view I have expounded.

The plan of this course of lectures is very simple. First, I go straight to the New Testament, as the fountain and authority, yet not so much to collect its statements as to find out the position of the death of Christ in its presentation of Christianity as a whole; and, therefore, the first lecture is entitled **THE NEW TESTAMENT SITUATION**. Then, as the light in which the people of the New Testament saw the death of Christ depended on the education of the Old



Testament, I go back to study the institutions in which the death of Christ was foreshadowed ; hence the second lecture is called THE OLD TESTAMENT PREPARATION. Lastly, as we are not to believe anything merely because it is delivered to us by any authority, however divine, but are bound to penetrate to the inner reasonableness, which will be all the greater the diviner any doctrine is, I endeavour to harmonize the truth with the ideas and sympathies of the present time in the third lecture, which is, therefore, called THE MODERN JUSTIFICATION.

ABERDEEN, *October 6, 1908.*



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THE NEW TESTAMENT  
SITUATION





# I

## THE NEW TESTAMENT SITUATION

A YOUNG German theologian has recently published a work of remarkable learning dealing with the literature on the Life of Christ produced by his countrymen during the last hundred years.<sup>1</sup> The aim of that literature has been to get back to the figure of Jesus as He actually existed in the flesh and, by putting aside the accretions of tradition and the accumulations of

<sup>1</sup> SCHWEITZER : *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*.

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dogma, to ascertain precisely who He was, what He did, and what He said; and the cry of "Back to Christ" has been loudly repeated on our own as well as on the opposite side of the German Ocean. But the scholar referred to concludes his survey with a confession that, in his opinion, the travail of a hundred years has failed in its object: not because it is now impossible, by the methods of historical inquiry, to determine who or what Jesus was, but because, when He is found, He is not the person we had thought. We were seeking a teacher and a guide for ourselves, to whom nothing human should be alien and who should be in immediate touch with the aspirations and the problems of the present hour; but what we do find is one who is nineteen centuries old, who lives and moves and

has his being in an Oriental atmosphere, and who will not stay with us when we seek to detain him and have him as our own, but, escaping our grasp, reverts to that world of which he was a portion.

I cannot help thinking that there is a good deal of truth in this, and that at least it is a fair criticism of certain methods of studying the Life of Christ much affected at present by the author's fellow-countrymen.

In that life there were two elements inextricably mingled—the one temporal the other spiritual, the one transient the other eternal—and it is from the difficulty of distinguishing and reconciling these that the problems of the subject chiefly arise. On the one hand, Jesus was limited by space and time. He was born of a woman and had to relate Himself to the

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conditions of a certain age of the world ; He had to incorporate His own life with Jewish history and take up His career in a shape determined by the preceding course of the Kingdom of God ; the race to which He belonged was expecting a Messiah, who had been promised to the patriarchs and predicted by the prophets, and this predetermined the *rôle* in which He had to appear. On the other hand, He was uncircumscribed by space and time ; He had come from God and He dwelt in eternity ; He was destined to be not only the Messiah of the Jews but the Saviour of the world, having relations equally intimate with all sections of the human race.

Under the name of the Self-consciousness of Jesus it has been common abroad to discuss the relationship of Jesus to this twofold *rôle*—that is to say, to ascertain

what He knew Himself to be and what He was aware He had come to the world to do. I am not sure if this term is a very happy one ; for it is open to question whether or not He was always fully conscious of Himself. Some of the finest and some of the grandest things are unconscious. Thus humility is not aware of itself: if it were, it would not be humility. Genius, too, is largely unconscious ; and it is quite possible that religious genius—or whatever else may be the best name for that in our Saviour which animated the details of His conduct—may be unconscious too. It must never be forgotten that He lived by faith—He was the Author and Finisher of faith, exemplifying in Himself the virtue which He recommended to others—or that to Him, above all others, the prophecy applied, “ Who is blind but My servant

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or deaf as My messenger?" It may, besides, be questioned whether He was at all times equally conscious of both sides of His vocation : may He not have been, for example, more conscious of the temporal and local side of His destiny at the commencement, and more of its worldwide and eternal aspect at the close of His ministry?

That He was acutely conscious of a Messianic vocation cannot be denied without eliminating so much from the evangelical records as to make them practically useless for historical purposes. Even His own favourite title for Himself, "the Son of man," is now almost universally recognized to have been derived from the passage in Daniel where one like unto the Son of man is seen coming to the Ancient of Days in the clouds of heaven; and this passage



undoubtedly describes a Messianic scene. So, likewise, the other great title, "the Son of God," whatever may be its ultimate meaning, is surrounded with Messianic associations; its application to Him being in the first place, at any rate, derived from its application to the Jewish kings. While these were the more intimate names of the expected Deliverer, the two corresponding popular titles were "the Son of David" and "the Christ"; and these also Jesus connected with Himself. It has, indeed, been frequently argued of late that, when He demanded of the scribes how, in Psalm cx., the Messiah could be the Son of David when at the same time He was called his Lord, He intended to acknowledge Himself not to be in the Davidic line. This I believe to be a mistake, but here it need not be argued,

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for, even in that case, He was claiming to be the Messiah. The actual term "Christ" was avoided by Him for reasons which can be easily explained; but, when at the critical moment the apostles through the lips of St. Peter solemnly bestowed this title upon Him, He accepted it with fervour; the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem was a direct offer of Himself in the Messianic character to His fellow-countrymen; and, in spite of the failure of this attempt, He acknowledged Himself on oath, before the high priest, to be the Christ.

① On the other hand, there are manifold indications that Jesus was conscious of more catholic relationships with men and of more intimate relations with God than would be suggested by the term Messianic. Even in the use of the phrase "the Son of man" He clearly

overstepped the limits of purely human consciousness, when He claimed that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins or when He described the Son of man as coming in the clouds of heaven to be the Judge of quick and dead; and it is difficult not to recognize in the phrase itself a worldwide connection with men in general far beyond the compass of a Messiah of the Jews. As for the other name, "the Son of God," while in the Synoptists it may be purely Messianic, St. John states categorically that the Jews accused Him of blasphemy because, by applying it, or allowing it to be applied, to Himself, He made Himself equal with God. In His references to God and the world unseen, so abundant in the ordinary course of His ministry, He betrayed an intimacy with the supernatural far above

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the reach of ordinary men, while in the breadth and wisdom of His teaching about human nature and human relationships there was revealed an equally supernatural knowledge of what is in man.

It was, however, as the end of His earthly course drew near, that He first fully revealed how different was His own conception of Himself and of His destiny from that entertained by His contemporaries or even by His disciples. The thoughts of the latter about Him were Messianic in the most narrow and literal sense. That is to say, the success of His enterprise would, in their eyes, have involved the seizure of the Jewish throne, the expulsion of the Romans from Palestine, and the setting up of a worldwide empire with Jerusalem as its capital. Anything less than this was failure; and as for death at the hands of the authori-

ties of the nation whose king they expected Him to be—this meant, in their estimate, utter and final ruin. The Pharisees and Sadducees themselves were not more convinced than were the apostles, on the eve of the final passages of Christ's career, that death and burial for Him could have but one meaning—namely, the collapse of His cause and the falsification of His claims.

Nevertheless, Jesus did die, and was buried. As He uttered His expiring cry, and as the stone which sealed the door of the sepulchre sank into its place, there was not a shadow of doubt in the minds of the Jewish authorities that the career of a false Messiah had come to an end, and that of Him or His pretensions nothing more would ever be heard. And what could His disciples say? They entertained the very same presuppositions

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as to what the course of the true Messiah must be, and as to the evidence which must prove any pretended Messiah to be a false one. The invariable assumption of modern naturalistic Lives of Christ—down to the very latest, that of Otto Holtzmann—is, that the disciples believed in the resurrection of Christ because they were intensely anticipating it, the excited expectation creating the event. But never has anything less historical been imagined. Religio-political illusions have not been so rare in this world as to render the possibility of such a thing in any case inconceivable ; and, bitter as it must have been to admit the fact, the disciples had overwhelming reasons for believing that they had been mistaken. There was nothing whatever to protect them from the logic of events. The enterprise in which they had been engaged had terminated ;

and there was nothing to mitigate their despair. With this correspond all the truly historical notices of those hours which followed the expiry and the burial of Jesus. The holy women went to the sepulchre, not to see whether or not it was vacant, but for the purpose of anointing His dead body, and, when they reported to the apostles that they had seen Him alive, their words seemed to them as idle tales and they believed them not. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus let out with perfect simplicity their disbelief in what the women had experienced, and the posture of affairs, as seen by those about Jesus, could not have been more pointedly or pathetically described than in their words, "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." St. Thomas only put into words of brutal plainness the scepticism felt by

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all ; and, even when the risen Saviour appeared to the five hundred in Galilee, it is admitted, some still doubted. So far from being so excited with the hope of His resurrection as to be willing to accept any evidence, they were so much the reverse as to be only capable of being convinced "by many infallible proofs."

These proofs were forthcoming. At least as early as the confession of His Messiahship by the Twelve, through the lips of St. Peter, Jesus Himself had known that, instead of ascending the Jewish throne, He was to die at the hands of the authorities of the Jewish nation. This He endeavoured to communicate to the disciples, returning to the subject again and again and adding detail after detail, so as to familiarize them with the unwelcome conception. In their minds the effect was nil ; for



they could not take it in, and, attributing to the strange words of their Master some occult, parabolic meaning, they persisted in their own theory of the development of the Messiah's career. The mind of Jesus undoubtedly, however, dwelt more and more upon the gloomy aspect of the future; yet it is hard for us to comprehend how He was affected by the change in His prospects. On the one hand, if we think of the future, in all its details, as known to Him, there seems to be an unreality in His conduct. Yet this is only a single instance of the difficulty which, to our minds, always attends the foreknowledge, even by a divine Being, of coming events; and it is not difficult to feel how imperative it was that He should carry out the Messianic programme to its issue by offering Himself in the

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character of Deliverer and King to the nation which had received the promises. On the other hand, there can be no doubt about the reality of the darkness in which His fate involved Him or the pain He suffered from the rejection of His claims by His countrymen. As He advances step by step into the gathering gloom, He has all the appearance of one who is being led by a way which he knows not, although gleams of the glorious secret of Providence come through now and then. Jesus missed the Jewish throne, but the providential force which carried Him past it swept Him up to an infinitely greater height, and, in the moment of losing all, He obtained the empire of the universe, being, we seem to feel at this point, in the grasp of a Power above and beyond His own consciousness.

While it may be difficult to determine with exactitude when and how the eyes of Jesus were opened to this transformation in His fortunes, and we speak on the subject with faltering and yet perhaps with overbold lips, there is no doubt at all when and how the eyes of the apostles were opened to it: to them this transmutation was the effect of the resurrection, which changed and transfigured everything. It changed the terrible series of events through which they had been passing from being the act and triumph of sinful men into the design of the wonder-working God; it changed Jesus from being a false and discredited Messiah into the King of kings and the Lord of lords; and it changed themselves from the shamed adherents of a defeated cause into the champions and witnesses of a Gospel

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which held in its hand the conquest of the world.

Such is the situation in the New Testament. In the speeches of the apostles, and especially those of St. Peter, at the beginning of Acts, it can be seen with what firmness its principal outlines had fixed themselves in the apprehension of the Christian community. During the seven weeks between the Passover and Pentecost the minds of the disciples must have been in a state of intense activity, passing through one of those crises by which great convictions are produced in men not so much by the vigour of their own thinking as by the force of the impact made on them by providential events, or, as the devout student will recognize, by the action of the Spirit of God. In vindicating the movement of which they

were the champions, they pointed to the gift of tongues and the effects it had produced ; and they traced these directly to a promise given to themselves by One whom they had seen ascending into the heavens : at His departure He had told them to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, and now it had come in forms palpable to all. This was evidence that He who had given them the promise was alive, though invisible, and seated in some position of power, from which He was sending forth these tokens of His mind and will. But this evidence, accessible to all, was only supplementary to even more direct evidence they had enjoyed themselves in the many appearances He had made to them during the forty days. Through these they had been thoroughly convinced that their conceptions of the natural course of the

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Messiah's career had been mistaken ; for whereas it had seemed to them impossible that He should die, this was now seen to be obligatory, and, whereas they had expected to see the Messiah ascend the Jewish throne, the intention of Providence had been to set Him on a throne infinitely loftier, as King and Lord of heaven and earth.

From convictions such as these others of equal moment could not but inevitably develop themselves. If their Master was really holding this exalted position now, He must always have been far higher and greater than they had realized when companying with Him in the lowly days of His flesh. Their minds accordingly now flew back over the past and saw everything in a new light. Many hints of His, and sayings which they had scarcely noticed

or had misunderstood, now came back to memory and fitted into their places in the new universe of ideas which was shaping itself in their consciousness. They now began to know their Master after the spirit; and, though they had known Him after the flesh, they now henceforth knew Him so no more. It was this transfigured Christianity that they preached to the world; they were themselves transfigured by the experiences through which they had passed; and it was in this exalted mood that they thought out the religion which was about to capture the heart of humanity. There has never been any Christianity as an actual power in this world except the Christianity of the resurrection. Of course, the apostolic Christianity carried in its bosom also all the tender human facts of the preceding years and all the

shadows of the humiliation of Christ ; but the attempt being made in our day to go back to Christ in the sense of making Christianity consist solely of what Jesus did and taught in the days before His burial—with the resurrection left out—is a return to the position of the disciples in the days of their ignorance, if not to that of the enemies by whom He was crucified.

Now, in this new situation created by the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord, a place unique and essential was taken by His death. This had, at first, been the great stumbling-block. By the Jewish authorities it was interpreted as a verdict of Providence in their favour, stamping Jesus of Nazareth as a false Messiah. We may hesitate to attribute the same inference to the disciples, and, indeed, the state of



their minds during the days when their Master was lying in the grave might form a theme for study which would not be easily concluded. It would be probably safe to say that their love still held fast, even when their faith gave way, and that they must have been conscious of rich salvage, in the words and other memories of their Master, even if there had been shipwreck. But that the cause in which their fortunes had been embarked had suffered irretrievable shipwreck must have been, if not their expressed, at least their subconscious conviction. A Messiah must reign, not die; and the death of Jesus must have been all the more mysterious to them because, while death is for the guilty, life is the portion of the innocent, and they knew their Master to be holy, harmless, undefiled,

and separate from sinners. When, however, the resurrection and the ascension became to them facts of experience, the death also assumed an entirely new complexion. Instead of being the triumph of His enemies, the despair of His friends, and the termination of His own career, it assumed the aspect of a sacrifice offered for the sin of the world—such a sacrifice as none but a divine Being could have offered, and such a sacrifice as involved immeasurable benefit for all the children of men. The burial was a kind of imprisonment for the debt of the race, but the resurrection was a divine acknowledgment that this debt had been discharged—"He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification"—and it was on the basis of this discharge that He was raised to the right hand of power and entitled to

distribute gifts to men, especially the gift of the forgiveness of sins. It may be that this conclusion was not reached quite as rapidly as the others, already referred to, which are elaborated so distinctly in the earliest Christian preaching recorded in the beginning of Acts ; but it must have been drawn very soon, because remission of sin through the blood of Christ stood in the very forefront of the Gospel which Christianity had to preach as soon as it began to evangelize the world.

By Dr. Dale, first, and then by Dr. Denney, what may be called the Biblical Theology of this subject has been exhausted ; and nothing can be more impressive than, under the guidance of either of these able expositors, to pass from one circle of ideas in the New

Testament to another, and see the position which the doctrine holds in each. The unanimity of the New Testament authors is thus seen to be remarkable. St. Peter is the earliest spokesman ; and, both in his speeches reported in the Acts and in his Epistles, the forgiveness of sins is put forward as the primary blessing of the Gospel, and this is directly connected with the death of Christ. By St. John, the other intimate of Jesus, the same language is held in all his writings. Between these two comes in St. Paul, and, through all his epistles, from the Thessalonians, the firstfruits of his literary activity, to the Pastoral Epistles, which came from "Paul the aged," the same testimony is heard, though it reaches its greatest height and intensity at the points where his genius was at its fullest stature, such as Galatians

and Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. Nowhere, however, is a more striking witness borne to this truth than in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which, in some respects, stands by itself among the New Testament writings, being, as Dr. Denney has observed, the most theological of them all.

Even more noteworthy than the unanimity of the writers is the weight of these utterances. It is not only in passing allusions or in verses which are easily forgotten that this subject is referred to, but the principal places in which it is stated and discussed are great texts, palpitating with the spirit of inspiration and embodying the very essence of the Gospel—texts which subdue the mind of the reverent reader, who feels that he is standing on holy ground. Thus, in St. Peter, we have the great words: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were

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not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"; and again: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye are healed." In the earliest writing of St. John we come at once on the triumphant passage: "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: unto Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen"; and at the very height of this Book of Revelation we read how "they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou

wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests ; and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders : and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Nor is the tone of sentiment different in his latest writings ; for we read in his First Epistle : " If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth ; but, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and

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the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin"; and a little further on: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And, if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is, however, in St. Paul that the voice of revelation on this subject strikes the deepest note. Take, as a specimen, this from the fifth of Romans: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth His love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"; and add to it the following from the fifth of II. Corinthians: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though



God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Who does not feel, as he merely listens to such quotations, that they contain the heart and kernel of the Gospel? and who would not say, on deeper consideration, that any representation of Christianity as a whole into which statements like these do not fit sweetly and naturally cannot be the true one?

Now, I venture to say that there are many works on the Atonement which do not really face these cardinal and classical texts, much less rejoice in them. As a specimen may be mentioned the work of the late Dr. Macleod Campbell.<sup>1</sup> I do

<sup>1</sup> "The Nature of the Atonement," first published in 1856.

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not think that any sympathetic and Christian mind can read this work without a sense of reverence for its author ; he is so evidently a good man, and so many of his observations obviously spring from a deep experience of the divine life in the soul. But the author does not face-up to the classical texts on his subject in the New Testament. He has a few favourite texts of his own, chiefly taken from St. John and, as a rule, bearing only remotely on the subject with which he is dealing, and these he quotes incessantly, because they form convenient vehicles for conveying his own ideas ; but he has only infrequent and casual references to such passages as those referred to above, making no attempt to interpret them carefully or to sound their truth to the bottom.

On the Continent it is not unusual to

meet with works which behave towards these classical passages in a much more cavalier fashion. In Ritschl's famous work,<sup>1</sup> for example, it is allowed at the critical points that St. Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews teach the orthodox view; but the writer takes the liberty of dissenting from them, appealing against them to the words of Christ, as the only final authority.

Whatever may be thought of such an appeal, the challenge to come to the words of Christ Himself is one which a Christian theologian cannot decline; yet, when we attempt to meet such writers on their own ground, it is far from easy to get into close grips with

<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation," 1870-74; third edition 1888. The first volume (historical), and the third (doctrinal), but not yet the second (exegetical), are accessible in English.

them ; for most of those who would thus appeal from St. Paul to Christ would not allow that anything recorded by St. John as spoken by Christ can be accepted as trustworthy ; so that even a great text like John iii. 16 would be thrown out of the argument. In like manner the report of St. Luke that the risen Saviour, in conversation with the two on the way to Emmaus, said to them, " O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory ? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself," would have no effect upon them, because, of course, in their opinion, there was no bodily resurrection.

Still there remain two sayings of our

Lord, recorded in the Synoptists, which are enough by themselves to assure us that what was taught by the apostles about the connection of the forgiveness of sins with the death of Christ had been anticipated by the Master Himself. The one of these is the statement that the Son of man had come to give His life a ransom for many; and the other is the great saying, uttered at the institution of the Lord's Supper, about the new covenant in His blood, shed for many for the remission of sins. Ritschl's exegesis of the former of these is the reverse of satisfactory: all he will admit to be implied being that the death of Christ is, in some way, connected with the removal of sin; while no justice is done to the idea of "ransom," which, however, is a vital element in the statement. As for the other saying, a great deal has been

attempted in the way of breaking its force by magnifying the discrepancies in the different accounts of the incident; but the documents have an additional guarantee of immeasurable importance in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Church from the beginning; and Dr. Denney has done well in insisting upon the prominence of the ideas of sin and its removal in both of the sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the teaching of Jesus Himself, as well as in all the other types of teaching in the New Testament, our doctrine holds a position from which it cannot be dislodged. But what I am principally insisting upon in this lecture is something broader: it is the place of the Atonement in the entire New Testament situation—not in the literature so much as in the

<sup>1</sup> A full exegesis of both of these classical passages will be found in the author's "Christology of Jesus," ch. v.

history—its place in the system of facts and truths of which Christianity consisted, after it had undergone the experiences of the resurrection and the ascension. As Christ thereby laid aside the garments of His humiliation and put on His robes of exaltation—as He passed from being the lowly Man of sorrows to be the Prince at God's right hand, to whom had been given all power in heaven and on earth—so His death, instead of being a humiliating enigma, was recognized as being the ransom given for the redemption of the world, in accordance with God's eternal plan and in agreement with the voice of prophecy.

It is interesting to observe that, as soon as Christian thought began to speculate profoundly on our subject, this was the aspect of the truth on which it fastened; for Anselm's famous question

*Cur Deus homo?* is intended to be answered in this very sense. This acute and famous schoolman pointed out the balance and proportion between what is believed about the person of Christ on the one hand and the estimate formed of His work on the other. The person being such as by the resurrection and ascension Jesus was proved to be, then, the incarnation can only have taken place for some transcendent object; and, on the other hand, a work such as the redemption of the world can only have been undertaken by One such as Jesus was demonstrated by these facts to be. This balance will always be found to hold good in theology. Lower the conception of the person, and inevitably the work which He came into the world to do dwindles into that of a teacher and an example; lower the work from that of the



redemption of the souls of men from the guilt, the power, and the eternal consequences of sin, and inevitably the person is degraded in the same proportion. But a full and scriptural doctrine of Atonement will always have as its presupposition and accompaniment a doctrine of the Saviour like that of the second chapter of Philippians, where He appears as One who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, or that of the mystic words with which the prologue to the Gospel according to St. John commences: "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God."

I am not denying that any portion of the Lord's activity detached from the rest—say, His teaching—has virtue in it, and may do people a great deal of good; or that any section of His

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life, detached from the rest—say, that which terminates with His burial—may be a subject of study and an object of reverence, exercising an influence the extent or value of which one would not desire to circumscribe. Our own generation has reaped so much profit and delight from the rediscovery of the earthly life of Jesus that it hardly seems to require anything else. But, after all, the whole is greater than the part; nowhere in the New Testament, not even in the Gospels, does the history of Jesus either end with His burial or commence with His birth; and, while fragments of the Christian community may be satisfied with a fragment of the Gospel, Christianity itself must keep possession of the whole gift of God. If there are those wishing to bear the Christian name who believe that Jesus

was only the child of Joseph and Mary, and that He never rose out of the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, then we frankly concede to them that His death cannot have been anything like what we call the Atonement; but, if this Man was, in His origin and destiny, all that the New Testament represents Him to be, then it harmonizes with the entire phenomenon to believe that His death, besides being the key to the mystery of His earthly fortunes, was a transcendent act, effecting for human beings in the world unseen a change by which have been secured both their peace with God here and their unending felicity hereafter; and this objective result of the death of Christ, anterior to our experience, yet requiring to be appropriated in experience, is the primary benefit and virtue of the Atonement.



THE OLD TESTAMENT  
PREPARATION



## II

### THE OLD TESTAMENT PREPARATION

ONE of the blessings inherited by those branches of the Church which derive their spiritual lineage from John Calvin is a deep and abiding reverence for the Old Testament. In the other section of Protestantism this sentiment had never been sufficiently strong from the beginning ; it was completely broken down during the ascendancy of Rationalism ; and it has

not been restored by such modern leaders of thought as Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Yet without a profound and sympathetic knowledge of the Old Testament the New can never be fully understood. While, no doubt, many preceding elements mingled in the composition of the New Testament, the Old Testament was infinitely the most important influence. From this source the mind of Jesus Himself was thoroughly imbued; and the apostles derived from it the ideas as well as the language by which they interpreted Christianity. Far deeper even than this, indeed, is the connection between the two Testaments. As the Old Scots Confession has it, the same Church of Christ has subsisted under both the Old and the New Testaments; and the one dispensation was not only a divine preparation



but a divine prefigurement for the other.<sup>1</sup>

Especially has the doctrine of the Atonement its roots in the Old Testament; and without an appreciative knowledge of the sacrificial system of the old dispensation it can never be understood. It was in the light of their experience of the Old Testament sacrifices that the New Testament authors wrote as they did about the death of Christ, and it was in the same light that Jesus Himself spoke as He did on the same subject at the institution of the Last Supper. In the foregoing lecture we have seen that to the first disciples the death of Christ was the

<sup>1</sup> "We maist constantlie belief that God preservit, instructit, multiplait, honourit, decoirit and frome death callit to lyfe His Kirk in all aiges, fra Adam till the cuming of Chryst Jesus in the flesche."—KNOX'S "Works," II., 98, 99.

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great stumbling-block, but that this stone of stumbling was turned into the very foundation-stone of the Christian faith as soon as His death was recognized as a ransom paid for the sin of the world ; but it must have occurred to some to ask how it was that an interpretation so original suggested itself at that time ; and this is the question we have now to answer.

It is true that, when we now attempt to familiarize ourselves with the ritual of sacrifice as this is laid down in Leviticus, we find ourselves in a very alien element ; and, when we attempt, by the aid of modern scholarship, to master the details of the system, we at first find ourselves involved in blinding confusion, so various are the interpretations of the different symbols suggested by different scholars ; for unfortunately

the biblical text merely supplies the laws and directions without giving the reasons for them, and thus unlimited scope is afforded for divergent theories and conflicting speculations. Still, here and there in the scriptural text significant hints occur, suggestive of deep, underlying principles. Of these perhaps the most remarkable is Leviticus xvii. 11, where, in speaking on an entirely different subject—namely, the eating of blood—the sentence occurs, as if incidentally: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (or, as it is translated by some, “through the soul”). Here we seem to be enabled to capture the very essence of sacrifice: the blood is regarded as the life or

soul of the flesh ; this animal life of the victim is substituted for the human life of the worshipper ; and this takes place by divine appointment—"I have given it to you upon the altar."

Another hint of perhaps equal significance is to be found in the frequency with which the making of atonement by means of blood is spoken of as if it were the whole purpose of sacrifice. This, of course, was not really the case. The purpose of sacrifice, as of all religion, was the communion of man with God ; but so conscious was the Old Testament worshipper of distance and estrangement, which could only be overcome by an act through which fellowship was restored, that this bulked in his mind as if it were the whole ; and the nomenclature of the Law itself, as if unconsciously, coincided with this sentiment.

It must be confessed, it is by no means easy for us now to transport ourselves into the state of mind and feeling of a worshipper on his way to the ancient sanctuary. As the student of literary history finds something baffling in the apparently indubitable fact that poetry preceded prose in the evolution of literary forms, the human mind moving with perfect freedom within the constraints of verse before it could move with any grace in what appears to us the freer medium, so it will always be a puzzle how, in the evolution of religion, sacrifice preceded prayer, and how, in the dumb show of sacrificial ritual, religious feeling embodied itself with assurance centuries before it had learned to express the same sentiments with facility in praise and prayer. Yet of the fact there can be little doubt. Even in the earliest accounts of

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Genesis the offering of sacrifice by Cain and Abel precedes by a generation the notice in the days of Enos that "then began men to call on the name of the Lord," and, while in the Mosaic law there is little or no mention of prayer, the most minute and elaborate directions are laid down about sacrifice.

When we try to imagine to ourselves an Israelite setting out for Jerusalem to one of the feasts, taking with him a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat—the pick of his flock—or perhaps all three, and, along with these, some choice specimens of the produce of his fields or his vineyard, and, when we contrast his equipment with our own, as we set out for Church any Sunday, he seems to us a strangely unintelligible figure. There is nothing, however, more certain than that the contrast between him and us is a superficial one, and that, if

we could penetrate beneath the surface, we should find in his soul the same elements of worship as in our own. If gratitude for past blessings, aspiration after entire consecration, and the desire for communion with Heaven be the sentiments which make us acceptable worshippers, we may be certain that the same qualities were those by which he was fitted for the journey in which he was engaged. Between the means, indeed, by which we express our sentiments and those by which he was going to express his there is a vast difference ; but it may be doubted whether in all respects we have the advantage. We express our gratitude, for example, in the words of a prayer or the verses of a psalm or hymn ; he expressed his in deeds—by bringing to Jehovah specimens of the possessions with which God had blessed him, very

much in the way in which an old retainer might carry, every year, to the big house a bouquet of flowers, a basket of ripe apples, or a cluster of honey out of the garden with which his kind master had presented him. Words and music are easily come at ; but there was a fine solid actuality about the means of worship employed by the Israelite. When the bullock of the burnt offering rose entire in smoke towards heaven, to signify the consecration to God of the entire being of the worshipper, so costly an expression of a thought which must enter into all worship seemed to mean business. And might not the pressure of emotion in the worshipper's mind be all the stronger through having had time to accumulate, as months had elapsed since his last visit to the house of God?

But there was one sentiment which



bulked very largely in the mind of the Israelite worshipper—this was penitence. No doubt he would often bring this with him from home, as he thought of the omissions and transgressions of the preceding year ; and this was a strong force impelling him towards the sanctuary. Human nature being what it is, conscience must always form a large element in what is called the religious faculty ; and, while, no doubt, there are many sentiments which may draw or drive towards the house of God, those worshippers will generally be found to go thither with the greatest frequency and alacrity who have felt the anguish of a broken heart. But, when the worshipper reached the sanctuary, everything there was fitted to deepen this state of mind. The sanctuary itself consisted of three enclosures. In the Holy of Holies the

presence of the Deity dwelt in awful remoteness, and here only the high priest might enter. Adjoining it was the Holy Place, to be entered only by the priests. Outside both was the Court, where the worshippers assembled; and here the most prominent object was the altar, to which the worshipper himself brought the victim. In the presence of the priest he laid his hands on its head. This action has been variously interpreted; but there can be little doubt that it was a symbol of confession. This is made very clear by what happened at a similar stage on the Great Day of Atonement, when the victim was doubled, but only with the object of thereby representing more clearly the two sides of one idea; and, while one of the animals went, as usual, to the altar, the other had the sins of the whole people

confessed over its head and carried them away into the wilderness—that is, into inaccessibility and oblivion.

The next act was the slaying of the victim with the worshipper's own hand, which was intended as an acknowledgment that he deserved to die on account of his sin. The blood, as it escaped, was caught by the priest and sprinkled on the altar. This was the atonement proper. But opinions differ widely here as to the precise point of the symbolism. The acceptance of the blood by the priest, the representative of God, and the lavishing of it on the altar, which, in a certain sense, may be said to have betokened the presence of God, might appear to indicate that the worshipper's acknowledgment of his life as forfeit to the divine holiness was accepted by the Divinity; and this notion would be sup-

ported by the striking fact that, at the making of the covenant in Exodus xxiv., while one half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar, the other half was sprinkled back on the people, as if to indicate that the Deity, after accepting the life, which had been confessed to be guilty and forfeit, returned it again, purified and invigorated, for a new existence and activity. Some have thought the idea of the symbolism to be the interposition of the life of the victim between the Deity and the soul of the worshipper. The fundamental notion of the verb is to "cover"; but how exactly the covering was supposed to act—whether in the way of extinguishing the wrath of the Deity, or of protecting the soul of the worshipper, or of hiding away the sin—it may not be possible to determine, as no distinct indication is given in the

documents, the action being supposed to speak for itself. And it really does so: it is life for life, the victim dying in order that the guilty may live.

In the Holy Place stood the altar of incense, with the shewbread and the golden candlestick; and these obviously spoke of a stage of reconciliation more advanced than that symbolized in the Court. The incense signified the soaring of the spirit to heaven in gratitude and praise. But even here the idea of reconciliation was not altogether absent: for, in at least one kind of sacrifice, the blood of the victim was sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense.

The Holy of Holies signified the innermost communion. Here stood the ark of the covenant; the tables of the law deposited therein typifying the will of God, as the light, standing by,

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typified His holy love ; while the figures above, bending towards the centre, symbolized the nearness and devotion of the worshippers. But that even here reconciliation was not forgotten was indicated not only by the fact that the lid of the ark bore the sacred and pathetic name of the Mercy-seat, but by the fact that once a year the high priest brought in hither the sacrificial blood and sprinkled it.

Such were the stages through which the imagination of an Israelite was designed to pass when he visited the sanctuary. The proceedings of the occasion concluded with a sacrificial feast, in which, the strain of preceding emotions being relaxed, he held happy communion not only with his God but with his family and friends, and it is possible to look upon this as the culmi-

nation of the whole proceedings. Yet this is a feature of all religious cults whatever, whereas the distinguishing mark of the Israelite worship consisted in a certain loftiness and intensity of emotion—the dealing of a sinner with the Most Holy, the justification and reconciliation of the guilty.

Thus have I touched lightly on only a few points of the sacrificial system in the old dispensation; a detailed and minute study would, I believe, greatly increase the impressiveness of the whole; but there may be advantages in the slightness of this treatment, because the naked outlines seem to reveal unmistakably the character and drift of the system.

It requires, indeed, no very long or close inspection to discern the imper-

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fection of that economy. Although the victim was the property of the worshipper, it could only in a very modified sense be his substitute. This office was forced upon it, and could not, in the nature of the case, be voluntary. It is true, the animal died; but the death of an animal is on a totally different plane from that of a man. Hence it has been usual for Christian theology to discern in the ancient ritual a series of indications pointing forward to a sacrifice in which all the virtue of the ancient sacrifices was to be swallowed up and far transcended. It is true, it used to be too confidently assumed that the men of the old dispensation were capable of perceiving the imperfection of the arrangements under which they lived, and of appreciating their typical significance. But at least to the mind of



God, we may reverently infer, this fulfilment was ever present, and He had in view the sacrifice of One who was so identified with humanity as to be able to be every man's substitute, and yet so far above humanity that His single death had a virtue adequate to the need of the whole world.

This imperfection of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is amply acknowledged in the great New Testament commentary on the Levitical law, contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For there is verily," says the author, "a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." Still more explicitly he says, further on: "The way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as

the first tabernacle was yet standing, which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, which stood only in meats and drinks and divers washings and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." Most explicit of all is the declaration in the last chapter occupied with this argument, where it is bluntly said: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin."

Through several chapters the contrast is drawn between the old dispensation and the new, with the object of bringing out the superiority of the latter, and especially the glory of Jesus Christ, who is its agent and administrator. First, He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This is an order far above that of Aaron, as was prefigured by the fact that Abraham, and, through him, his son Levi, the head and origin of the Levitical system, paid tithes to Melchizedek. If the Levitical priesthood had been perfect, there would have been no need of a priest arising after another order ; but the Levitical priest was neither near enough to God nor near enough to man for the full discharge of the functions he had undertaken. The Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of others ; but the perfect priest required to be holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. The Levitical priest might for a certain length of time assist the worshipper and superintend his spiritual progress, but then he might die and leave the worshipper in the lurch ; the perfect priest, on the contrary, being

immortal, is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through him.

Again, the place of worship is vastly different in the two cases. Although, to the childish apprehensions of the ancients, an immeasurable sacredness clung to the Holy of Holies, there is, to minds emancipated from the glamour of inherited association, something ludicrous in the idea that so straitened a place should be the abode of the Lord of heaven and earth; and a similar inadequacy cleaves to nearly all the arrangements in the material structure of tabernacle or temple. But Jesus Christ has entered, not into this structure made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

The climax, however, of the contrast lies in the difference between the offer-

ing in the one case and that in the other: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the precious blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." These old sacrifices had to be continually repeated—a striking testimony to their inadequacy—"but this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool; for by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

The result of the whole is, that by the sacrifice of Christ there has been established a new and more perfect re-

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lation between God and man; or, as it is expressed in Scripture, a new covenant has been formed. The first covenant was made with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, on their departure from Egypt, and it was sealed with blood, as covenants even among heathen peoples usually were in ancient times. But it was defective, and it was broken; so that a new covenant became requisite. And here again the seal is blood, but blood so precious as to guarantee that the union and communion shall never be broken, because the conscience is satisfied and the law is written on the heart.

The remark has been recently made that the support which the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is able to lend to any New Testament doctrine

must be dependent on the amount of credit attaching to the Levitical ritual itself. And this is unquestionably true. It would be vain to appeal to the Old Testament sacrifices as evidence for the New Testament doctrine of Atonement — if that system were merely a human product, invented by the superstition of ignorant men and kept up by the self-interest of priests. Unfortunately this is the impression produced by not a little of the criticism of the Old Testament with which we are at present familiar. Viewed in this modern light, the sacrificial system appears as a late development in Old Testament religious history, emerging at a point where religious sentiment was in process of decay and healthy inspiration giving place to formalism. Some would, I fancy, if challenged, save themselves from this inference

by explaining that, though the codification of the Law was late, the practice of it was early, many of the rites and ceremonies which it enjoined reaching back to the remotest antiquity. Whether or not this be a satisfactory explanation of the Mosaic authorship so distinctly ascribed in the records to these laws and practices, I will not at present inquire; but, I venture to say, it is not creditable to Christian scholarship to allow the impression to be produced that the sacrificial system was the product of a late and decadent phase of religion, instead of vindicating it as of divine origin and as serving a wise end in the providential education of the race.

Those scholars who depreciate the Levitical system in the style above hinted at are wont to set over against it, as the truly divine thing in the Old Testament,



the inspiring history of Prophecy, by which principles were developed in place of rules and morality cultivated in place of religion. And it cannot be questioned that this contrast was a real and a deep one. The religion of sacrifices and priests tended to formalism, and the round of feasts and visits to the sanctuary prescribed in the Law had a tendency to become a soulless routine. This became all the more objectionable when it was combined in the minds of the people with the belief, which may be called the cornerstone of the popular Israelite creed, that national and individual prosperity was guaranteed by the observance of the Law. There was, indeed, a noble sense in which this was true; in fact, it is in all times and in all places the most fundamental of all truths: a nation or a family or a man that fears God and keeps His

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commandments is on the highway to true welfare ; whereas to pursue the opposite line of conduct is to be on the broad road which leadeth to destruction. There is, however, an ignoble way of construing this truth by which it may be turned into falsehood ; and this was the besetting temptation of the Israelite mind, which the warnings of prophets were required to correct. The divine promise was turned into a selfish motive ; the services of religion were performed, not out of love to God, but with an eye to the rewards which they would bring ; and religion was made a substitute for morality. Men whose worldly circumstances prospered in this pursuit inferred that their health and wealth were tokens of the divine approval, as well as tributes to their own character ; and so religion, instead of ministering to humility, became

an occasion for arrogance and boasting. This was the state of mind against which the prophets launched their thunderbolts ; but, when these, in this mood, denounce blood and incense, the temple and the festivals, it is an entire mistake—although one often made in our time even by able men—to suppose that they were enemies of the public religion or indifferent to the laws by which it was regulated. The truth is, any form of religion, however spiritual, may be thus abused, and be, therefore, deserving of prophetic animadversion ; yet it would be too wild a mistake to look upon those who undertake this prophetic office as the enemies of all religion.

Besides, however, the chastisement of the rich and prosperous, whose religion was a sham, the prophets and thinkers of Israel had the further office of vindi-

cating the poor and needy, whose religion was real. For the principle, so constantly insisted on by the writers of Psalms and Proverbs, which promised prosperity to the religious, while it denounced destruction against the wicked, did not always appear to hold good. Not infrequently the righteous were the reverse of happy in their worldly circumstances, while, on the contrary, the prosperity of the wicked sometimes grew beyond all reasonable bounds—their eyes stood out with fat; they had more than heart could wish—and they were not slow to draw or to proclaim the inference of the friends of Job, that the sufferings of the righteous were evidences of hidden sins and tokens of the Almighty's displeasure.

Many were the twistings and turnings which the Spirit of revelation allowed the pious mind of Israel to take on the way

to the solution of this mystery. At one time the explanation resorted to was, that the prosperity of the wicked was only temporary, spreading, great in power, like a green bay-tree, but falling all the more ignominiously when suddenly struck with the lightning of the divine judgment. No doubt any human experience could supply instances of this kind, which might serve to redress the balance of justice ; but these were not frequent or notable enough to establish a theory ; and there were opposite instances, in which the prosperity of the unrighteous appeared to be lifelong. In such cases, however, death redressed the balance—this was the second explanation attempted—the ghosts of his secret vices surrounded the hypocrite on his death-bed ; the accusing faces of those he had wronged tormented his dying hours ; and he expired in agony of conscience.

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Of this, too, there were examples, and a prophet or poet might know very striking ones; but, alas! here again there were opposite instances, in which the self-satisfaction of the prosperous wicked never deserted them, and they had no bands in their death. Still one more alternative, however, might be tried: although the wicked rich man might die in peace, with the fabric of his prosperity unshaken, the revenge of Providence was taken on his posterity, who, brought up by him in habits of folly, soon squandered on vice the property which he had accumulated, so that, in a generation or two, his seed returned to the condition from which he had sprung. Of this there could, no doubt, be adduced numerous striking instances, and in this explanation the mind of the people, groping towards the light, may long have rested.

But there were other explanations, and towards these the unsatisfied intuition was forced forward. Immortality was the magic word ; for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; but this word the race was never able distinctly to pronounce till Jesus Christ brought it to light by His Gospel. An explanation not so remote was the sanctifying influence of suffering on character ; and in the Book of Job and elsewhere it may be seen how far this was grasped. But there was still another explanation which the Old Testament was to reach before it closed, while the New Testament, at its opening, was to illustrate it with an incomparable example. And this touches our subject to the quick.

Among the prophetic writings there

are none more entitled to be considered as the blossom and flower of the whole than the four passages in Isaiah dealing with the Servant of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> About these there is a literary mystery; for they seem to be a separate formation from the strata in which they are embedded, and yet they harmonize wonderfully with their surroundings in their general elevation of tone. It is also mysterious why they should be separated from one another and sprinkled over the adjacent context, as they have an obvious internal coherence. Taken together, they present the features of a figure which is one of the most wonderful products of the prophetic spirit. Obviously it is a birth from the pain and travail of some era of great vicissitude; and probably the different lays of which it

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xlii. 1-4; xlix. 1-6; l. 4-9; lii. 13-liii. 12.



is composed embody the experiences of some deeply exercised servant of God.

The problem is suffering—the suffering of the righteous—that age-long puzzle of the Israelitish mind. Why do the righteous suffer? How can the suffering of the righteous be reconciled with the character of a just and holy God? The reply is an original and profound one. It is that the sufferer may be suffering not for his own sins, but for the sins of others, not for his own good, but for the good of others.

This is especially brought out in the last lay, contained in Isaiah lii. 13–liii. 12, where there rises to view One whose visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men, yet who sprinkles many nations and becomes a wonder to those in whose eyes He had been without

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form or comeliness. They had esteemed His woes and griefs to be the natural punishment of His sins, "but He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." As the prophet turns the idea round and round, it occurs to him that the position of the Servant has been that of the innocent victim substituted at the altar for the sinful worshipper—"He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter"—and, having once caught this idea, he develops it fully and closes with it the whole grand exposition of his conception—"When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand; He shall see of

the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied; by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many: for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

The question of the Ethiopian eunuch, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this—of himself or of some other man?" is one which has agitated the ages and is perplexing scholarship to this very hour. The Jews apply the whole to the sufferings of their own race in both ancient and modern times; and it is wonderful how good a justification they are able to make out; for the principle is a deeply

human one—that the welfare of the many is bought by the sufferings of the few, and that the progress of the world is due to the self-sacrifice of the heroic. Some apply it to Jeremiah or Zerubbabel, or to some unknown prophet of the Exile; and Isaiah could never have expounded the idea as he has done unless he had first experienced it in his own person. There is no reason why so grand a principle should not have many applications. But there is One to whose personal history it applies, line by line and word by word, so perfectly and naturally that we are impressed, as we read this chapter, with the same awe with which we read His actual history in the final stages of Gethsemane and Calvary. Though the most strenuous efforts have been made to prove that this passage has no connection with Jesus of Nazareth, or

that it applies wholly to someone else, yet the simple truth is, that, while it is only with an effort that we can think of it as applying to any other, it all belongs to Him by native right and title.

And thus at the close of Old Testament Prophecy we arrive at the very same point to which we are brought at the end of the Law:— Christ is a victim, and His death a sacrifice;— His soul was given for the souls of men; and, through the sufferings of the innocent, the guilty are raised to glory, honour, and immortality.

It has sometimes been attempted to break the force of the argument from the Old Testament sacrifices, of which a statement has been attempted in this lecture, by the observation that these were offered not for sin as we now understand the word—in a deeply ethical

sense—but for ritual uncleannesses, mistakes due to ignorance or forgetfulness and the like, to which we cannot now attach any importance. So far as there may be any truth in this, it is an evidence for the antiquity of the rites. The Law had to begin as we do with children; but it was educating the conscience all the time; and, as this grew intelligent and exercised, the sins with which it occupied itself became more real; the prophets deepened the lesson of the Law, till in a psalm like the fifty-first we see what was the result of this providential education. Yet even Jesus had to resume the same process; for the Sermon on the Mount is not at all what many suppose it—a code of easy-going morality—but, on the contrary, a more stern discipline of the conscience, carrying deeper the work of Law and Pro-

phesy. Even the Beatitudes are not, as many suppose, the positive elements of Christian character, but rather the negative prerequisites for entrance into the kingdom of God. They describe, on all its sides, that chastened, receptive, and consciously empty state of mind to which, in religion, everything is given—not righteousness, but a bottomless sense of unrighteousness. If these three chapters near the beginning of the Gospel of St. Matthew were better understood, the chapters near the end which narrate our Lord's passion would be better understood also. Not only do multitudes of professing Christians, but multitudes of Christian teachers and writers know only a Christianity which makes the good better, not one that makes the bad good. This is the reason why the Atonement is so obscure

to them ; and that thinker had truth on his side who remarked that all heresies spring out of an inadequate sense of sin. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick ; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."



## THE MODERN JUSTIFICATION



### III

## THE MODERN JUSTIFICATION

THE demand has of late been loudly expressed that all truths professing to enter into the essence of Christianity should be capable of statement in terms comprehensible by all; and it may not be unreasonable to expect, in addition, that any truth aspiring to as high a position as that claimed for the doctrine of the Atonement should come home to the intelligence of human beings with a sense of welcome and gratification. So great a doctrine ought not to be the

shibboleth of a small sect in a corner, but ought to impress the general mind by its majesty, tenderness, and simplicity. It must, nevertheless, be confessed that this doctrine has excited great hostility, and that, to some who are undoubted friends of Christian truth in general, it has a savour which is foreign, if not distasteful. This must excite doubt as to whether the statement of the doctrine has been just or felicitous; for truth which in itself is divine and worthy of all acceptation may through the tactlessness of its expounders be robbed of its legitimate effect and thus make a false impression. As has been already hinted, the mind of the Church was late in approaching this subject, and there still cleaves to its formulation something of the crudeness and angularity of the Middle Ages; but the toil of more

recent thinking has not been in vain, and the truth is beginning to impress the minds of men with its native simplicity and force.

The first strong opposition, after the Reformation, to the orthodox mode of stating the truth on this subject, came from the Council of Trent;<sup>1</sup> and it is curious to note how closely many subsequent attacks, coming from within Protestantism, approximate to the objections then taken by the Romanist doctors. The point made by the latter was that in Protestantism justification by faith was too isolated from the rest of experience. Salvation, on God's part, is a whole, comprising not only justification but adoption and sanctification; and, on man's part, while it includes faith, it

<sup>1</sup> 1545 to 1563.

includes, besides, repentance, love, hope, and other virtues ; and salvation ought to be sought as a whole and not in fragments. In reply to this, the Protestants were able to prove that the forgiveness of sins occupies a more commanding place in the Scriptures than the Romanists allowed to it, being made far more an object of pious desire, which craves instant satisfaction ; and faith, by which forgiveness is appropriated, is sometimes in Scripture spoken of as if it were the whole of salvation, as in the great Protestant text : “ By grace are ye saved, through faith ; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Much, however, of this controversy took place between parties differing too widely in their religious experiences and beliefs to be able to find common ground ; for the Romanists looked upon forgiveness

as something which had come to them unawares and as a matter of course in baptism, whereas to the Reformers it was the peace which had visited their awakened consciences, when the terrors of the Lord were agitating them and eternal perdition was staring them in the face.

The generation of the Reformers had not, however, passed away before, within Protestantism, there was raised a grave and commanding voice, making the same objection, but in a different form and from a different point of view. The objector was Osiander, an able preacher of the Reformation at Nuremburg and subsequently a professor of theology at Königsberg.<sup>1</sup> He found fault with the Protestant doctrine because it separated justification too far from sanctification,

<sup>1</sup> Osiander's date is 1498 to 1552.

showing, indeed, no necessary link between the two. People were taught to believe that, if only they were forgiven, everything else would follow as a matter of course: they were inside the covenant, and, however often they might fall into sin, they could never fall out of it. Faith was directed to a single point in Christ's history—namely, His expiatory death—and this single act it was to be continually repeating as long as life lasted. Those acquainted with the post-Reformation history of the Lutheran Church will be constrained to confess that in these exceptions of Osiander there was an element of truth. In many quarters the great doctrine of the Reformation had been deified and was treated as if it were not only the leading but the only article of the creed. Any mention of good works was frowned upon with suspicion as savouring



of Romanism. By many theologians of influence the followers of Calvin were denounced as being worse than Romanists, because they believed in the binding nature of the Old Testament Law, and especially of the Decalogue.

The same defect, thus exposed by Osiander, has continued to recur from time to time in Protestantism down to the present day. After seasons of revival particularly, in which many ill-instructed people have been awakened and converted, it is no unusual thing to find the initial stage of religion regarded as if it were the whole. Converts go on repeating the same testimony till it becomes nauseous to their hearers as well as unprofitable to themselves. In the religion of many there is only one epoch; there is no programme of expanding usefulness or advancing holiness; and faith

is only the constant repetition of a single act.

Osiander's remedy for this morbid state was a fuller apprehension of Christ. It was not the work of Christ, or any particular aspect of that work, he held, which was the object of faith, but Christ Himself—not His benefits, but His person. Christ is not divided: He must be received or rejected in His entirety. There can be no doubt that there is a deep truth here. Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; in the promises of the Word of God are set forth different aspects of the fulness that is in Christ, and it is by applying itself to these in succession that faith unfolds all its powers and possesses itself ever more fully of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

By faith, Osiander contended, not only

is the soul justified, but it is united to Christ; and this union is the antecedent of justification no less than of sanctification. This obviates one of the principal objections felt by many to the doctrine of the Atonement. To them it has seemed as if, when the sinner stood exposed and condemned in the sight of God, a third party was brought in, to assume the responsibility and pay the debt. But what right had a third party to do so? How could the imposition of the debt on him be justified? This is a serious difficulty; but, if the Saviour and the sinner are one, through faith, by a living and personal connection—if they are one as husband and wife are one—there is a manifest justification for the one assuming the responsibilities of the other. As the riches and poverty of husband and wife are mutual and they

cannot be separated in honour or dishonour, so do the sins of the sinner become the Saviour's and the merits of the Saviour the sinner's not merely by a rule of law but by a necessity of life. It is astonishing how, even in the Epistle to the Romans—the classical passage of Scripture on our subject—the doctrine of Atonement melts into that of union with Christ. The latter is the superior truth ; and the forgiveness of sins through faith would not hang isolated in the experience of Christians if it were seen how this, like all other blessings of a spiritual nature, is only an instalment of what is ours if Christ is ours.

The next movement of thought by which the Atonement was again brought to the front was that now known as Arminianism, which arose in Holland in

the beginning of the seventeenth century, and soon spread to other countries. This was a movement among the followers of Calvin as the one just referred to had taken place among those of Luther. If the doctrine with which the name of Luther was imperishably associated was Justification by Faith, the one associated in the mind of the world with Calvin's name is Election; and in the latter case, as in the former, there had been among the theologians of a second generation, if not among the Reformers themselves, a tendency to exaggeration—to deal with a single doctrine as if it were the whole of Christian truth, and to draw the logical consequences in extreme forms. I am afraid, it cannot be denied that in Holland, two or three generations after Calvin's death, there had come into vogue, in the pulpits, a kind of preaching which was

not of a very humane or wholesome description. Whereas, in the heroic days of the struggle for civil and religious liberty in that country, the doctrine of election had been a symbol for the divine presence and protection, by which confessors and martyrs had been nerved to do and dare, it had now become a dogma, the negative and repellent side of which was made as prominent as the positive and comforting, if not more so ; timid souls, instead of listening with delight to the doctrine of the grace of God, tortured themselves with curious doubts and questionings as to whether or not they belonged to the number of the elect ; and the free offer of the Gospel itself was compromised, because every declaration of its value was followed up with the warning that only the elect could in the long run get the benefit of it.

It was a logical deduction from this unnatural way of construing a precious doctrine of Holy Writ, when theologians went on to limit the Atonement itself, assuming it to be inevitable, if election was limited, that the Atonement should be limited also ; for the Son could have died only for as many as the Father had chosen from all eternity. Thus there came into theology the dreariest set of discussions by which it has ever been darkened ; the Atonement being reckoned as a quantitative magnitude ; Christ being represented as if He had paid the exact equivalent of the sins of so many persons and no more ; and the problem thrust upon thoughtful minds how, then, the Gospel could be seriously offered to those for whom no provision had been made.

Undoubtedly there is an ultimate mystery in the relation between the human

and the divine wills in salvation. Salvation is of God and His purpose is everlasting; saved sinners are all aware that, unless God had thought of them, they would never have thought of Him; we love Him because He first loved us. Yet, on the other hand, the will of man is free; it can take or leave God's offer; and it is urged to exert itself as if everything depended on its own energy. How these opposite points of view can be harmonized is the question: there are two converging lines which must meet somewhere, but their point of union lies beyond human ken. When, however, there is thus an antimony of opposite aspects of truth, and the existence of a mystery somewhere has to be admitted, it may be by no means a matter of indifference where exactly the mystery is located; and it is of very great importance that we should not have it



in two places, if one will do. Now, this mystery of God's will and man's will lies inside the doctrine of election. There we accept it and regard it with silent reverence. Not once or twice, but many times, does the Scripture itself locate it there, not denying the difficulties thereby occasioned to the intellect, yet, on the whole, magnifying election as an adorable phase of redeeming love. But it is surely a great mistake, after the mystery has been thus disposed of, to introduce it also into the doctrine of the Atonement, and to have the difficulties all over again. This has no biblical sanction; for the Bible does not speak of a limitation of the Atonement. On the contrary, it says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; and I will not call him a

bold man—for the name he deserves is a wholly different one—who would venture to modify that glorious statement with qualifications of his own devising. In the last Scriptures which proceeded from the pen of St. Paul—the Pastoral Epistles—strong and frequent testimony on this point is met with, as if the aged apostle had dreaded some sophistry by which the honour of the Gospel was to be obscured. Thus, in I. Timothy, he speaks of “God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth ; for there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time ; whereunto I am ordained a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ and lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and

verity." Further on, in the same epistle, he refers to "the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." And in the Epistle to Titus, after exhorting Christians who are servants, he proceeds: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men (the correct translation is, "that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared"), teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

With this tone of sentiment in the Bible the instinctive voice of the

pulpit has, when not warped by theological theory, been in accord, and at critical moments the Church, when defining doctrine, has been kept true to the same principles. Thus, in mediæval times it was a common phrase of pulpit rhetoric, that one drop of the blood of Christ was sufficient to wash out the sins of the whole world—a phrase which would command assent if repeated anywhere in the hearing of intelligent Christians—and this is only a popular mode of saying what is stated by the Synod of Dort, that great oracle of Calvinism, that the death of Christ is sufficient for all, adapted to all, and freely offered to all.<sup>1</sup>

Here is laid the true foundation for

<sup>1</sup> "Hæc mors Filii Dei est unica et perfectissima pro peccatis victima et satisfactio, infiniti valoris et pretii, abunde sufficiens ad totius mundi peccata expianda."—Canons of the Synod of Dort, II., 3.

a universal offer of the Gospel; and Lord Chancellor Halsbury was only displaying his own ignorance when he expressed the opinion that the free offer of the Gospel is irreconcilable with Calvinism. As if not certain, however, of his own judgment as to this, he bolstered it up with the decisions of Councils held in the seventeenth century at Jerusalem and Constantinople—or rather at Jassy, for what he quoted from the Council of Constantinople was really taken from the decrees of a Council held at Jassy, in Moldavia, an extremely remote corner of Christendom.<sup>1</sup> Now, what were those Councils, and what was their authority? They arose out of an attempt to introduce the principles of

<sup>1</sup> The passages quoted by the Lord Chancellor will be found, in historical setting, in KIMMEL: "Monumenta Fidei Ecclesiæ Orientalis," pp. 409. 429.

Protestantism into the Eastern Church, which was made by Cyril Lucar, a remarkable man, who, after imbibing the principles of Protestantism, and especially of Calvinism, in several European countries, which he visited, became successively Patriarch of Alexandria and Patriarch of Constantinople, and endeavoured to introduce reforms into the Church of his fathers, where they were sorely needed, as they still are. The attempt failed, and he, in making it, lost his life. After his death the Greek Church condemned his principles, but, of course, in far greater ignorance of what these really were than the Romanists had been, when they condemned the same doctrines at the Council of Trent. Yet these are the precious Synods the decrees of which are evoked to support a calumny, in consequence of which the

United Free Church lost its case in the courts of law and was denuded of its property! Had the Lord Chancellor quoted against us the ill opinion of some authority notoriously Arminian or Romanist, everyone would have recognized the futility of the proceeding; but by appealing to ecclesiastical councils, the history of which was unknown, he threw dust in the eyes of the public, and perhaps deceived himself. Yet the appeal was as irrelevant as it would be to quote the resolutions of a parliament of Charles the Second as judicial deliverances on the character and administration of Cromwell.

In more recent times no thinker on our subject is more deserving of attention than Horace Bushnell,<sup>1</sup> an American divine, whose book, entitled "Vicarious

<sup>1</sup> Bushnell's date is 1802 to 1876.

Sacrifice," excited widespread ferment first in his own country and then in the other English-speaking countries of the globe. Bushnell was a man of singularly fine spirit, strongly anchored to the central Christian facts and experiences, yet with an athletic intellectual curiosity, which would not allow him to accept traditional formulæ without personal examination or be satisfied with statements of doctrine unsupported by present and living experience. The old orthodoxy of the Pilgrim Fathers had, in the course of time, fallen asunder into two sections, the one of which, the Congregationalist, was liberal and friendly to theological novelties, but inclining to Unitarianism, while the other, the Presbyterian, was conservative and disposed to turn upon all novelties a searching and jealous eye. To the former section



Bushnell belonged, not only by inheritance, but by the make and bent of his own spirit. He was courageous, original, and passionately devoted to truth. His latest biographer<sup>1</sup> admits that he usually studied a subject after his book upon it had been written; the book being struck off in the first ardour of mental occupation with the subject, while the colder and more prolonged study, carried out in the light of the criticisms evoked by the publication, not infrequently led him back to the positions from which he had diverged; and he was never lacking in candour to admit a change of mind. This was the case with his views on the Atonement, even Dr. Charles Hodge admitting that, before the close of the book just named, he substantially reaffirms the orthodox view,

<sup>1</sup> T. T. Munger, 1899.

while, in a later work,<sup>1</sup> he went so far in developing a profounder and more biblical view as to disappoint those who had hailed his earlier utterance with enthusiasm but now looked upon him as having relapsed into orthodoxy.

The rock of offence which had specially given occasion to Bushnell's recoil from the traditional view was a style of speaking of the Atonement as if it were a transaction between three separate parties, the first of whom, God the Father, was represented as jealously intent upon His own honour, while the second, the Son, endured all the pain of satisfying the law, and the third, the sinner, bore off all the advantage. Such a style of expression may have been prevalent in the preaching and the litera-

<sup>1</sup> "Forgiveness and Law," written ten years after "Vicarious Sacrifice."

ture of the section of the American Church opposed to that represented by Bushnell; at all events it cannot be denied that it has prevailed widely enough to call for rebuke and warning; and, in administering these, Bushnell has earned the gratitude of the Church Universal.

What he insisted on, in opposition to this habit, was the identity in sentiment and intention between the Father and the Son. In Scripture the Atonement is always represented as the Father's work, which the Son undertakes at His wish and commandment. Likewise, the Son is concerned equally with the Father in maintaining the integrity of the divine character and the honour of the divine law. So far did Bushnell go in holding that whatever Christ did for salvation the Father did also, and

especially that whatever the Son suffered in this interest the Father suffered also, that he has not infrequently been charged with reviving the ancient heresy of Patripassianism; but it would not be easy to go too far in affirming the participation of the heart of God the Father in the pain occasioned by the sin of man or in the sufferings by which this is overcome; the prophetic writings of the Old Testament especially abounding with passages in which such divine emotion is expressed.

It is not, however, inconsistent with the identity between the Father and the Son to assume that a special part in the working out of human redemption is played by the latter; for, indeed, one of the principal indications of the existence of separate Persons in the Trinity is the habit in Scripture of assigning

separate functions to these in the work of salvation. If the incarnation is an experience of the Son alone, there is no reason why the suffering due to bearing away the sin of the world should not, in a special sense, be His also. By the incarnation He identified Himself with the human race ; but He identified Himself with it far more closely when He bore its sin ; and it is not unnatural to believe that on this account the human race is now different in the Father's eyes. It is sometimes assumed, indeed, to be unjust to treat anyone in a special manner because of what another has done on his behalf. But is this in harmony with human nature ? Are we not constantly doing things for our fellow-creatures for the sake of others which we would not do to them for their own sakes ? Will not the unworthy son of a

worthy father get a hundred chances for his father's sake to none of which he is entitled on his own account? This law of substitution abounds in human affairs; and it may reach up into the divine procedure also.<sup>1</sup>

If the harmony between the mind and will of the Father and the experience of the Son, contended for by Bushnell, be a fact, it will follow that in the whole course of His earthly life, and especially in its later stages, the Son must have been the object of the Father's supreme love and satisfaction. Of this there is abundant confirmation in Scripture, and that the Saviour was conscious of this Himself was sufficiently demonstrated when He said: "Therefore doth My

<sup>1</sup> The statement of this principle in a sermon on the Atonement in Mozley's "University Sermons" is among the acutest modern utterances on our subject.

Father love Me, because I lay down My life that I might take it again; no man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again; this commandment have I received of My Father." From this it has been confidently inferred that the sufferings of Gethsemane and Calvary cannot have been penal. The Father cannot, it is argued, have been at the same time punishing Him and loving Him. But this may be too rashly reasoned. There are human analogies, not only conceivable but recorded in actual history and biography, which point the opposite way. The Father's approval of the Son may have been enormously increased just because the Son was willing to be put in a relationship to Him so contrary to His nature as substitution assumes.

This would have produced a mysterious agony altogether unique in its character ; and is there not a hint of this in the voice from the cross, so overawing in its mystery : " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? " In the human conscience, also, there is something which corresponds : there is a confidence towards God begotten of the assurance that sin has not only been pardoned but atoned for, which can never be produced by forgiveness apart from penalty.

In all the foregoing instances I am inclined to recognize valuable modifications or corrections of the statement of the doctrine made by Anselm, or of the popular statements founded on Anselm's ; but the most interesting development of speculation in recent times is that which



occurs in the writings of John Macleod Campbell and Albrecht Ritschl. I associate these two names, because between their views there is a remarkable similarity. The one was a minister of the Church of Scotland, deposed for heresy in 1831, and the other a German professor, who died at Göttingen in 1889. As far as I remember, the one never quotes the other ; and there is an extraordinary contrast between their equipment and methods, Macleod Campbell being a singular instance of literary helplessness, his few ideas shining, like jewels among rubbish, from amidst wide spaces of confusion and irrelevancy, while Ritschl advances armed to the teeth with learning, and is able to make ideas from a hundred quarters converge upon the point at issue. Nevertheless, the Scottish thinker, in spite of his awkwardness, perhaps

comes nearer to the heart of the subject, as he certainly gets far nearer to the heart of the reader, who recognizes everywhere in his writings the presence of a refined and saintly personality. Both writers practically eliminate what is most distinctively associated with Atonement in both the Old and the New Testaments. Both appear to have been comparatively insensible to the element in sin which we call guilt, and, therefore, they were also unsympathetic to the process by which this is put away. Yet both are profoundly interested in the more positive constituents of salvation; and in Ritschl's great work, which, in spite of the limitation of its title, really ranges over the entire field of theology, by far the most original and vital portion is, in my humble opinion, that which has to do with Christian

Ethics. Both writers, while, as has been said, practically abandoning the Bible doctrine of Atonement, give the name of Atonement to those elements of salvation which they do recognize; they obliterate the distinction between justification and sanctification, and treat terms as equivalent, which, in exact theology, have been always treated as distinct. Such retention of theological terms, while their native significance is forgotten or exchanged for something else, has always been a habit of the Broad Church. I remember hearing the late Dean Stanley preach on a great text in which the phrase, "the blood of Christ" occurred, when, after explaining, in two or three sentences at the outset, that the blood of Christ was equivalent to the love of Christ, he proceeded to expatiate with fluency and

fervour on the love of Christ without making any further allusion to the solemn phrase of his text.

In both Macleod Campbell and Ritschl the dominant idea under which everything else is subsumed is the Fatherhood of God, and it is by the fascination of this true and attractive idea that the former teacher has won so select a following and exerted so intensive an influence. This doctrine, which has for its implicate the Brotherhood of man, they look upon not only as the peculiar message of Jesus, but as the ultimate revelation of God and of His relation to the human race. According to Macleod Campbell the traditional doctrine of Atonement is founded upon belief in God as the Ruler and Judge of men ; but this, he contends, is the inferior revelation of the Old Testament, and

cannot dominate the procedure of God as He is revealed in Christ: a father's dealing with his children being very different from that of a king with his subjects.

It may be questioned, however, whether this characterization of the Old Testament, which reappears so frequently in popular religious literature of a certain type, is just; for, all through the Old Testament, there goes a representation of the divine character and action much more nearly approximating to that of the New Testament—namely, that of God as Husband to His people. “Thy Maker is thine Husband,” says Isaiah; “Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you,” is the language of Jeremiah; in an emotional prophet like Hosea this idea is developed with astonishing freedom; and, in the Bible

generally, idolatry appears as conjugal unfaithfulness. With neither this idea nor that of divine Fatherhood is that of Ruler and Judge inconsistent: on the contrary, it embodies permanent relationships, which can never be without influence on the divine procedure; but these two kinds of love, attributed to God in the Old and the New Testaments respectively, will, if closely studied, lead further into the mystery of the divine procedure than the contrast emphasized by the scholars in question.

The love of God can only be understood by the love of man; and, the ampler anyone's experience of the latter, the juster will be his comprehension of the former. Human love is really a common name for a great variety of experiences, some of which are extremely unlike one

another. Among these may be distinguished a love which is free and a love which is bound. Of the former wedded love is the most prominent example, because in it there is a free choice on both sides, and it is dissoluble in the event of divorce ; while of the latter the most conspicuous example is parental love : a father has no choice whether or not he will love his children, and no conduct on the part of a child can dissolve the relationship.

In the history of our religion it was the free relation that came first. Israel lived in a connection with Jehovah which was free and dissoluble. That is, it was morally conditioned. Israel was assured of the favour and protection of the Holy God only as long as it kept His commandments. Very different was the relation of the surrounding nations to their deities :

the gods of the Philistines, Moabites and Ammonites were bound to assist their worshippers in battle and stand by them in other emergencies unconditionally on all occasions. By the false prophets in Israel the attempt was often made to put the relation to Jehovah on the same footing: thus, in the days of Jeremiah, for example, they taught the inviolability of Jerusalem in spite of the guilt of the nation. This made it necessary for Jeremiah, in opposition to such deceivers, to reiterate that the covenant with Jehovah had been broken, and to foretell that, in consequence, the assistance of Jehovah would no longer be forthcoming. The ethical nature of this relationship between Deity and worshippers is at present recognized by all deeper students of the history of Israel as the germ of all that separated that race from the heathen and



made it the prophet of holiness to the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, this truth proved capable, like every truth, of being abused ; and in the days of Jesus it had been converted into falsehood and cruelty. The Pharisees, secure in their own consciousness of keeping the Law and of, therefore, being entitled to the favour and gifts of the Almighty, looked upon the publicans and sinners as persons who had completely broken the covenant with Jehovah and thereby exposed themselves to the indignation and resentment of the Deity as well as the contempt and hatred of all good men. These sentiments they expected Jesus, as a pretender to holiness, to share. But, in reply, Jesus taught that there is another relation between God and man besides that free and dissoluble one : God is the Father ; and it does not become a father

to cease to love, however undeserving or wretched the child may be : on the contrary, the more lost the prodigal is, the deeper is the *desiderium* in the father's heart. This is the burden of all the parables of the fifteenth of St. Luke.

Such was the origin of our Lord's doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, the originality and significance of which it would not be easy to exaggerate. Nevertheless, this doctrine was not intended to blot out the earlier conception, in which there are elements of permanent value. The jealousy of the husband for the purity of the wife cannot be lost without the fabric of society crumbling away, and its equivalent in the religious sphere is the commandment, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."<sup>1</sup> Besides, the mutual choice in-

<sup>1</sup> I have heard the late Professor Dorner say with a blush, half indignation half shame, on his sensitive

volved in the marriage relationship is a fact of endless religious significance. If it be insisted that only one of these two great conceptions can be accepted as the ruling idea of Christian theology, the question may arise which of the two relationships—that of father and child or that of husband and wife—is, in its own nature, the more subtle, deep and comprehensive, and, therefore, the better fitted to shadow forth the relationship between God and man, between Christ and the soul; and this everyone can

face, and amidst a deathlike silence in his classroom, that a love which gives itself utterly and absolutely away, without respect to anything, even to character, is the love not of God but of a harlot. His construction of the justice of God as the internal cohesion of love—that is, its determination to continue itself, even when giving itself away—is one of the finest efforts of speculation in modern theology, and it bears directly on our subject. See the first volume of his *Dogmatics*.

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decide for himself. But unity of conception is not only the guide but often also the temptation of speculative theologians ; and the varieties of love which the human heart can experience, even towards the same persons, ought to warn us against placing limits on the love divine. So that, even if the ideas entering into the Atonement are not much suggested by the Fatherhood of God, it does not follow that they do not belong to Gospel truth or even to the truth found in the Gospels ; for the Old Testament conception reappears in the New Testament not only in St. John's imagery about the Bride of the Lamb, and in St. Paul's great passage on marriage, where the relation of Christ and the Church is compared to that of bridegroom and bride, but likewise in our Lord's own parable of the King who made a Marriage

for his son, as well as in His revival of the covenant-conception when instituting the Last Supper.<sup>1</sup>

At all events the New Testament conception is no more safe than was the Old Testament one from misuse. Some have pressed the idea of fatherhood so far as to admit of no punishment for sin except such as is of the most mild and disciplinary order, any mention of everlasting punishment being scouted as utterly out of the question. Now, what is this but a return to the old heathen notion, that a god must fight for his worshippers in all circumstances, or to that of the false prophets, that Zion was inviolable, whatever its guilt?

I cannot say that the other idea with

<sup>1</sup> It is a pity that in the narrative of the Last Supper the word "testament" is used instead of "covenant."

which Ritschl principally operates—that of the Kingdom of God—appears to me to have much bearing on our subject; and, indeed, I question whether the attempt to resuscitate this phrase is a happy one. I incline rather to think that its use was imposed on Jesus by circumstances; and it is certain that His followers had dropped it even before the close of the New Testament. But there is one idea of Macleod Campbell's to which I should like, before closing, to pay the tribute of a more cordial recognition—the one idea, it seems to me, not only of originality and genius, but of truth, contained in a book which has been both unduly lauded by its friends and unwisely attacked by its foes. Making, for the sake of argument, the supposition that all the sins of all the sons of men had been committed by

one man, he demands whether, if this man had thoroughly repented, he would not have been forgiven. Undoubtedly he would; and this may be a hint of what the Atonement of Christ really was. Christ's profound sense of the sin of all men, His identification of Himself with the race by whose members it had all been committed, and the pain He suffered in consequence—these undoubtedly formed a large element in His Atonement. Not only so; but His Atonement reconciles because it produces repentance in others. The contrition characteristic of Christianity has been produced in sinners by looking on Him whom they have pierced; it cannot be produced in any other way; and it is not by depleting the death of Christ of its mystery and solemnity, but by preaching it as a revelation of the nature of

sin as well as of the power of redeeming love, that hard hearts will be broken and sinful men and women led to abhor their evil past and to climb with alacrity and hope the white heights of holiness.

We know from our own experience how difficult it may sometimes be to forgive; and the difficulty is greatest, not when the mind is possessed with personal resentment, but when its indignation is stirred by an outrage upon that impersonal law of the universe which it must be the office of the Deity to conserve and defend. Yet, when genuine contrition is shown, the righteous wrath of the soul is appeased, and the offender is taken back with a warmth and an interest never felt for him before he had sinned.

Repentance is a most interpretative word, combining both the reconciliation of God to man and the reconciliation



of man to God, as a true doctrine of Atonement must. God is reconciled when Christ offers, on behalf of the race, a representative and universal repentance, which literally breaks His heart, so that He dies of it. This takes us so far into His actual experiences that here, if anywhere, we capture the heart of the mystery, though it remains a mystery still. On the other hand, man is reconciled when he makes Christ's act on the cross his own, repenting of his own sin, but doing so with a depth and thoroughness only to be learned from the mind and example of Christ. And here commences the new life of victory over self and over the world, which, while it may derive some of its rules from Mount Sinai or even from Mars Hill, must ever continue to imbibe at Calvary the spirit of humility and grati-

tude which is the unique and enduring quality of Christian holiness.

This may seem to put aside too much the notion of penalty ; but, surely, to be assigned by the Father a *rôle* in which He was to lose His life amidst not only agony of body but forsakenness of soul was, for Jesus, to be numbered with the transgressors ; and, unless we are to abandon altogether the attempt to understand His sufferings, there is nothing with which these can be so well compared as the experience of an awakened conscience. The virtue of this mode of conceiving the Atonement is that, at many points, it is touched by profound and tender human analogies ; and, I am persuaded, it is along this line that the reconciliation of the modern mind with a doctrine at which it has often stumbled must be endeavoured.

















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